

Free or Almost Free Things to do in Howard County

By Amanda Hof & Shannon Eltzroth

The best things in life are free, but one might think that's not true in Howard County, an affluent bedroom community of Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, Md., ranked as the third richest county in the nation (according to the 2006 U.S. Census) with an average household income of more than \$100,000, and a perennial on Money magazine's "Top Ten Best Places to Live in America."

While Howard County offers more than its share of upscale amenities and experiences there are also countless activities, events, attractions and amenities that are absolutely free. Even those not trying to pinch a penny, will want to take part in these sure-to-please, FREE, or almost free, ways to explore the wonders of Howard County.

Anytime

B & O Railroad Museum: Ellicott City Station

Whether a railroad enthusiast or Thomas the Tank Engine fan, the Ellicott City station is sure to please. It's the oldest surviving railroad station in America and the site of the original terminus of the first 13 miles of commercial track ever constructed in America. Admission is only \$5 for adults and less for seniors and children. Open year round, Wednesday through Sunday. For hours or additional information, visit www.ecborail.org or call 410-461-1945

Information above provided by the B & O Railroad Museum

Bob's Vintage Museum at Bob's BMW Motorcycles

Bob's Vintage Museum in Jessup features a one-of-a-kind exhibit of 30 vintage motorcycles, ultra rare accessories and side car exhibits, original posters and literature, a gift shop, snack shop and free coffee. For hours of operation or additional information, visit, www.bobsbmw.com or call 301-497-8949.

Days End Farm Horse Rescue

Come meet horses and see before-and-after pictures of successful rehabilitations, stop in the souvenir and tack shops, and gather information about programs. Daily tours are offered from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. No appointment is necessary for individual tours but call ahead to schedule groups. Parking is free; donations are appreciated but not required. For more information, visit www.defhr.org/sponsr/2008biz.htm or call 301-854-5037 or 410-442-1564.

Ellicott City Historic Sites: Ellicott City Colored School Restored, Firehouse Museum, Patapsco Female Institute Historic Park, Thomas Isaac Log Cabin

Visit the Historic District in Ellicott City to discover sites unique to the area and learn about the settlement and development of the region. Sites are open April through November, Saturday and Sunday from 1-4pm. For more information, visit www.howardcountymd.gov/RAP or call 410-313-5131

Game Club at Historic Savage Mill

Located in Savage, The Family Game Store at Historic Savage Mill sponsors free game clubs Friday or Saturday nights. Special events are often held to introduce new games. For event schedules or more information visit, www.familygamestore.net or call 301-776-5980

Heritage Orientation Center in Historic Ellicott City

Located behind the Thomas Isaac Log Cabin at the intersection of Main Street and Ellicott Mills Drive in Historic Ellicott City, this historic structure was the county's first court records building and is now home to a unique collection of exhibits on 18th and 19th century milling techniques, the floods of Ellicott Mills and the Ellicott family. Open daily. For additional information, visit www.howardcountymd.gov/RAP or call 410-313-5131

Historic National Road

The "Road that Built the Nation" is a great vacation destination. Authorized in 1806 to become America's first interstate highway, the Historic National Road took four decades to complete from Baltimore to Vandalia, Illinois. Howard County's own Mt. Airy and Ellicott City are featured stops along the Maryland 170-mile portion. Pick up, or download, a guide: Pick up at the Welcome Center in Historic Ellicott City (8267 Main Street, 21043 / 410-313-1900, www.visithowardcounty.com); download at,

www.visitmaryland.org/Pages/HISTORICNATIONALROAD.aspx

Information above provided by the Maryland Office of Tourism

The Howard County Conservancy

Headquartered at the 300-year-old Mt. Pleasant Farm in Woodstock, the Conservancy offers dozens of year-round educational programs for adults and children, including the popular Second Saturday Nature Walks. For hours of operation or more information, visit www.hcconservancy.org or call 410-465-8877

Howard County Historical Society Museum & Library

Located in the heart of Ellicott City's Historic District, the museum is home to one-of-a kind exhibits and educational programs. Free organ concerts and other low-cost events are offered several times a year. Museum hours are Tuesday & Saturday: 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm; Library hours are Tuesday, Thursday & Saturday, 12:00 - 4:00 pm and Wednesday 11:00 am - 3:00 pm. For more information, visit <http://www.hchsmmd.org> or call 410- 750-0370

Howard County Public Library

A major component of Howard County's strong education system, Howard County Library is a nationally recognized leader among the great public library systems that delivers high-quality public education for all ages. For locations, hours of operation, program listings or additional information, visit www.hclibrary.org or call 410-313-7890

Howard County Wildlife Driving Tour

Pick up a free copy of this informative guide to Howard County's wildlife. This colorful guide features, map, itinerary, species lists, optimal viewing times and more. To pick up or request a copy, visit the Welcome Center in Historic Ellicott City (8267 Main Street, 21043 / 410-313-1900), www.visithowardcounty.com

The Patapsco Valley History Exhibit

Visit the Welcome Center in Historic Ellicott City (8267 Main Street, Ellicott City, Maryland 21043, 410-313-1900) and view interpretive panels that tell the story of the Patapsco Valley. The panels are courtesy of The Friends of Patapsco Valley and Heritage Greenway Inc. To learn more or view online visit, www.patapscoheritagegreenway.org

The Shrine of St. Anthony

Located in beautiful western Howard County, the Shrine is a place of prayer, pilgrimage, peace and hosts individuals and groups for retreats, programs and meetings. Property features include gardens, walking paths and a historic manor house. For more information visit, www.shrineofstanthony.org or call 410-531-2800

Almost Anytime

Charity's Closet

Only open on Sundays from 1 – 4pm but so worth the trip. Charity's Closet is a women's and junior's thrift shop run by teens where everything in the store costs \$5. Find everything from accessories to shoes to prom dresses. All proceeds go to an organization designed to help disadvantaged women. Located at, 9090 Frederick Road in Ellicott City, MD 21043. For more information, visit www.successinstyle.org

Ellicott City's First Fridays, April – December

Ellicott City Historic District boutiques, salons, antiques, art galleries and more will open their doors for a unique evening shopping experience. Look for musical entertainment around town and special offers in some shops! Most shops are open until 8:00PM, times and participation are subject to vary. For more information visit, <http://ellicottcitymainstreet.com>

Ellicott City's Second Sundays, May – September

The lovingly restored shops of Tongue Row (access through Parking Lot D) invite local farmers, growers and artisans for a special Farmer's Market the Second Sunday of the Month. Fresh baked old world bread, local honey, fresh cut flowers and hand-made jewelry are just some of the treasures you'll find! Times and participation are subject to vary. For more information visit, <http://ellicottcitymainstreet.com>

Arts

Columbia Art Center

Located in the Long Reach Village Center, Columbia Art Center Gallery exhibitions and artist receptions are always free and open to the public. The Art Center also offers a lineup of free lectures and programs. For hours of operation, exhibit information, program listings visit, www.columbiaartcenter.org or call 410-730-0075

Columbia Festival of the Arts

This signature event has taken place on Columbia's Lakefront for more than 20 years. Columbia Festival of the Arts presents a host of top-flight artists and performers for two weeks every June. While many of the events require tickets, the opening LakeFest weekend is a free event featuring popular live bands, artists and vendors, a sidewalk chalk drawing contest, and the ever-popular cardboard Boat Float. For more information visit, www.columbiafestival.org or call 410-715-3044

Howard County Center for the Arts

The Howard County Center for the Arts in Ellicott City is a multi-purpose community arts facility that features two professional galleries, an intimate black box theater, classrooms, a dance studio and individual artists' studios. While programs have some fees, the center is open to the public and features free gallery exhibits and receptions. For hours of operation, exhibit information and more information visit, www.hocoarts.org or call 410-313-2787

Paint It: Ellicott City, A Juried Plein Air Paint-out

Artists are invited each summer to participate in an organized outdoor "paint-out" in Historic Ellicott City over two days. Festivities include street walking to see the artists at work, a welcome reception and a gallery reception at the Howard County Arts Council. For more information visit, www.hocoarts.org or call 410-313-2787

Rep Stage

Conveniently located at Howard Community College, Rep Stage offers professional theatre at a price everyone can afford. Small but mighty, Rep Stage has won seven Helen Hayes Awards. While regular pricing is modest, there are a number of free or nearly free events throughout the year such as pre-show lectures, readings and Wednesday evening, Pay-What-You-Can prices. For schedule and prices visit, www.repstage.org or call 443-518-1500

The Rouse Company Foundation Art Gallery

This gallery, located in the lobby of the Peter and Elizabeth Horowitz Visual and Performing Arts Center at Howard Community College in Columbia, is devoted to bringing a diverse range of quality exhibits to Howard County. For hours and current exhibit information visit, www.howardcc.edu

History

B & O Railroad Museum: Ellicott City Station

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Information above provided by the B & O Railroad Museum

Benjamin Banneker Historical Park & Museum

While just over the Baltimore County line in Oella, the Benjamin Banneker Historical Park & Museum is home to an impressive collection of artifacts and exhibits dedicated to the life and times of "the first African-American man of science". Also, discover excellent birding trails and gardens. For event listings, hours of operation or more information call 410-887-1081

Bollman Truss Bridge

Located in Savage, The Bollman Truss Bridge is the only known remaining example of an all-iron truss system patented by Baltimore engineer Wendell Bollman in the mid-19th century. For more information visit, www.howardcountymd.gov/RAP or call 410-313-4700

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The Columbia Archives

Located in Columbia's Town Center, The Columbia Archives is home to a one-of-a-kind collection of documents on the history and culture of the planned new town, Columbia, and the life of Jim Rouse, its founder. Open to the casual visitor or those interested in doing in-depth research. For hours of operation or additional information, e-mail the archives at Columbia.Archives@ColumbiaAssociation.com or call 410-715-3103

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Maryland Civil War Trails

Howard County's Civil War sites are part of the Maryland Civil War Trail –Baltimore: A House Divided. Pick up, or download a free guide and navigate the way to Civil War interpretative markers at sites across Howard County. Pick up: at the Welcome Center in Historic Ellicott City (8267 Main Street, 21043 / 410-313-1900, www.visithowardcounty.com); download at, www.civilwartraveler.com/EAST/MD/

Information above provided by Civil War Traveler

Parks & Open Space

Patapsco Valley State Park

One of Maryland's first parks, Patapsco Valley State Park extends along 32 miles of the Patapsco River, encompassing 16,043 acres and eight developed recreational areas. Recreational opportunities include hiking, fishing, camping, canoeing, horseback and mountain bike trails, picnicking and more. For more information visit,

<http://dnr.maryland.gov/publiclands/central/patapsco.asp> or call 410-461-5005

Columbia Association Parks & Pathways

Over 3,500 acres of open space, including 268 footbridges, 170 tot lots, the 40-acre Symphony Woods, 40 ponds and lakes, and natural open space areas, interlaced by more than 93.5 miles of pathways for walking, biking and jogging. Many sites include picnic areas and fitness trails. Get a complete map of Howard County's Pathways for a small fee at Columbia Association Welcome Center, 10221 Wincopin Circle, Columbia, MD 21044 or visit, www.columbiaassociation.com

Regional, Community and Neighborhood Parks

Howard County Department of Recreation and Park's numerous regional and community parks feature accessible playgrounds; picnic areas; scenic trails for hiking, exploring and fitness; ponds and lakes; adventure activities; historical and cultural sites; and much more. Amenities vary, for more information visit, www.howardcountymd.gov/RAP or call 410-313-4700

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Spirituality & Healing

Centennial Peace Garden at Bon Secours Spiritual Center

Located in scenic Marriottsville, the gate of this garden serves the same purpose as the great doorways in medieval cathedrals marking the transition from everyday to a place of peace and harmony. Inside, find a dry landscape garden with benches and nearby boulders shaped to form natural rooms or seating. Open daily from dawn till dusk. For more information visit, www.bonsecoursspiritualcenter.org or call 410-442-1320

Labyrinth at Bon Secours Spiritual Center

Unlike a maze, the labyrinth at Bon Secours Spiritual Center in Marriottsville has only one path which leads to the center and out again. The path winds throughout and becomes a mirror for where we are in our lives. Walk it with an open mind and an open heart. Open daily from dawn till dusk. For more information visit, www.bonsecoursspiritualcenter.org or call 410-442-1320

The Shrine of St. Anthony

Located in beautiful western Howard County, the Shrine is a place of prayer, pilgrimage, peace and hosts individuals and groups for retreats, programs and meetings. Property features include gardens, walking paths and a historic manor house. For more information visit, www.shrineofstanthony.org or call 410-531-2800

Just for Pets

Schooley Mill Horse Park

Bring your horse! This 192-acre park in Highland features an equestrian ring and riding trails. If you don't have a horse, that's okay, additional amenities include playing fields, picnic areas, historical interpretation and a state-of-the-art playground. Open from 7 a.m. to dusk. For more information visit, www.howardcountymd.gov/rap/ or call 410-313-4700

Shrine of St. Anthony, Blessing of the Animals

Pet owners can give thanks and ask for blessings upon their pets. All pets need to be on a leash. Blessing takes place in October in the piazza before the Shrine of St. Anthony in Ellicott City. For more information visit, www.shrineofstanthony.org or call 410-531-2800

Tail Lights - Symphony of Lights

December 14, 2010 4:30-5:45pm, at Symphony Woods in Columbia (use Merriweather Post Pavilion entrance off Broken Land Pkwy). Dogs and their families can enjoy a walk through the 1.4 mile Symphony of Lights display. Only \$10 per walker! Dogs and children under 5 are free! Registration required at www.hcgh.org/taillights or call 410-740-7840

Yappy Hour at The Wine Bin

Bring well-behaved dogs for Friday evening socializing and wine & microbrew tastings. The Wine Bin is a dog-friendly favorite in the Ellicott City Historic District. Yappy Hour occurs monthly in spring, summer and fall. For dates and more details visit, www.winebinec.com or call 410-465-7802

Worthington Dog Park

Dogs are invited to enjoy socializing and running without the confines of a leash. Park features include separate enclosures for large, small, timid & elderly dogs. A \$5 day- pass fee and proof of current license and rabies apply. Handlers must be 18 years of age; children under the age of twelve are not allowed in off-leash area. Open seasonally, weather permitting. Located at 8170 Hillsborough Road, Ellicott City, 21043. For more information visit, www.howardcountymd.gov/RAP or call 410-313-4700

The Yuppy Puppy

It won't cost to window shop, and for little more, pets can enjoy gourmet goodies and souvenirs at this elegantly decorated pet boutique on Main Street in Historic Ellicott City. For serious shoppers, The Yuppy Puppy offers upscale pet apparel, unique toys, and more! For hours, location and to shop on line visit, www.theyuppypuppypetboutique.com or call 410-750-7663

Just for Kids

Clark's Elioak Farm

Treasures wait in Ellicott City at this unique petting farm which is also home to many authentic figures rescued from the Enchanted Forest. A modest admission fee applies except for infants 12 months of age and younger. Also, Clark's Elioak is now open for the holidays with FREE admission for everyone (petting zoo and pony rides closed). For hours of operation or more information visit, www.clarklandfarm.com or call 410-730-4049

Family Fun Day at the Mall in Columbia

Every Thursday morning features a morning of lively children's entertainment at The Mall in Columbia. Kids can sing, dance and laugh with popular entertainers. 10 to 11 a.m. in the Lord & Taylor lower court. For a schedule or additional information visit, www.themallincolumbia.com/Events or call 410-730-3300

Healthy Howard Playground at the Mall in Columbia

Give the kids a break from shopping at The Mall in Columbia's Healthy Howard Playground presented by Howard County General Hospital. This fantastic play ground was specifically built for physical activity, learning and just plain having fun. Located at the Lower Level by JCPenney. For Mall hours visit, www.themallincolumbia.com/Events or call 410-730-3300

Kids Eat Free Sunday through Thursday

Kids eat free at these and many other Howard County Restaurants. Most are with the purchase of an adult meal. Other restrictions may also apply:

Sunday:

The Crab Shanty – Ellicott City, 2-9pm, 410-465-9660 / www.crabshanty.com

Monday:

Eggspectation – Ellicott City, begins in afternoon, www.eggspectations.com

Tuesday:

Union Jacks – Columbia Town Center, www.unionjackscolumbia.com

Wednesday:

Mangia Italian Grill & Sports Café – Marriottsville, www.mangias.com

Just for Grown Ups

Monster Mini Golf – Tuesday Night is Couples Night

Save big on Tuesday nights at Howard County's newest attraction! Couples play a round for only \$12.00 on Tuesday night. Monster Mini Golf is an exciting indoor monster themed glow in the dark 18 hole miniature golf course that offers a host of wacky, family-friendly activities at every turn. For hours and additional information visit, www.monsterminigolf.com or call 410-579-4653

Wine Tastings, The Wine Bin

Stop in this charming firehouse turned wine boutique and enjoy tastings of featured wines on a regular basis. The Bin stocks about 500 wines, with at least 200 selling for under \$20. For more information visit, www.winebinec.com or call 410-465-7802

Live Music Nights

From popular to classical jazz to pop to Blue Grass, these and many more Howard County restaurants offer live music that is perfect for “date night” or a night out with friends. Check with individual restaurants for schedules and other details:

Sunday:

Ranazul – Maple Lawn, www.ranazul.us

Monday:

Stanford Grill – Columbia, www.thestanfordgrill.com

Tuesday:

Café de Paris – Columbia, www.cafedepariscolumbia.com

Friendly Inn – West Ellicott City, www.thefriendlyinn.com

Stanford Grill – Columbia, www.thestanfordgrill.com

Wednesday:

Friendly Inn – West Ellicott City, www.thefriendlyinn.com

Pure Wine Café – Historic Ellicott City, www.purewinecafe.com

Thursday:

Lee Lynn’s – Ellicott City, www.leelynns.com

Stanford Grill – Columbia, www.thestanfordgrill.com

Friday:

Café de Paris – Columbia, www.cafedepariscolumbia.com

Friendly Inn – West Ellicott City, www.thefriendlyinn.com

Mangia Italian Grill & Sports Café - Marriottsville, www.mangias.com

Rams Head Tavern – Savage Mill, www.ramsheadtavern.com

Stanford Grill – Columbia, www.thestanfordgrill.com

Venegas Prime Filet – Maple Lawn, www.venegasprimefilet.com

Saturday:

Bistro Blanc – Glenelg, www.bistroblancmd.com

Friendly Inn – West Ellicott City, www.thefriendlyinn.com

Lee Lynn’s – Ellicott City, www.leelynns.com

Looney’s Pub – Maple Lawn, www.looneypubmd.com

Rams Head Tavern – Savage Mill, www.ramsheadtavern.com

The Crab Shanty – Ellicott City, www.crabshanty.com

Union Jacks – Columbia Town Center, www.unionjackscolumbia.com

Victoria Gastro Pub – Columbia, www.victoriagastropub.com

Not a set night, but happens occasionally or often:

Diamondback Tavern – Historic Ellicott City, www.diamondbacktavern.com

The Judges Bench - Historic Ellicott City, www.judgesbenchpub.com

Wintertime

Annual Open House and Holiday Sale, December 3, 2010; 5:30-8:30pm

Make it a holiday tradition. The Arts Council's Open House and Holiday Sale features works for purchase by local artists and artisans. For more information, visit www.hocoarts.org or call 410-313-2787

Candlelight Night in the Ellicott City Historic District

Come see the Historic District's special buildings and historical sites at night. Historic sites are open from 6 to 10pm. Also, enjoy some early holiday shopping. Usually happens mid November or early December.

Sponsored by the Ellicott City Restoration Foundation, for more information visit, www.ecrestoration.org

Candlelight Tour at Waverly Mansion in Marriottsville

For one weekend only, see historic Waverly Mansion dressed in its holiday best while enjoying refreshments, seasonal music and a garden club's Christmas decoration sale. Usually held the first Sunday and Monday in December; modest admission fees apply. For dates and more information, visit

www.howardcountymd.gov/RAP or call 410-313-5131

Christmas Time at Clark's Elioak Farm

For the first time ever, Clark's will be open for the Christmas season, November 26 to December 23, 2010 with Christmas trees, decorations and holiday crafts for sale. Enchanted Forest attractions are decorated with lights. Hayrides through the woods are offered too. Plus, Santa will be on hand for photos on Saturdays and Sundays from 11 AM to 4 PM and Wed, Thurs and Friday 3 PM to 6 PM. Never Sell the Land Farm Beef and Bowling Green Farm cheeses are also for sale. Admission is free; however, modest fees may apply for activities. For more information, visit www.clarklandfarm.com or call 410-730-4049

Ellicott City's Annual Midnight Madness, December 3, 2010

A holiday tradition, always, on the first Friday in December. Shops in Ellicott City's historic district are open until midnight. Festivities include a tree lighting ceremony, carolers and more. Be sure to stop by and visit some of the most unique shops in the state! For more information visit, <http://ellicottcitymainstreet.com> or call 410-313-1900

Holiday Mart - Gary Arthur Community Center at Glenwood, December 4, 2010; 10am-5pm

In it's 38th year, this favorite Howard County annual event offers seasonal gifts and merchandise created by 142 juried artisans. Additional festivities include door prizes, a children's craft corner and delicious concessions. For more information visit, www.howardcountymd.gov/RAP or call 410-313-4622

B&O Railroad Museum Ellicott City Station Holiday Festival of Trains

Don't miss this annual favorite! Toy and model train layouts include a custom-built, 360 degree multi-tiered O-scale layout, a miniature Thomas the Tank Engine G-scale layout, an N-scale layout, an O-scale Crazy Train layout and the Museum's permanent HO model train layout inside the Freight House. Begins late November and runs through January. A small admission fee applies, for more information visit, www.ecborail.org or call 410-461-1945

Natural Holiday Gift Sale & Crafts at the Howard County Conservancy

This popular holiday sale happens December 4, 2010, 10am-4pm. Meet local craft vendors and check out nature critter crafts for the kids. Admission is free. It all takes place at the Howard County Conservancy and the Gudelsky Education Center, Mt. Pleasant Farm in Woodstock. For more information visit, www.hcconservancy.org or call 410-465-8877

Poinsettia Tree at The Mall in Columbia

A longstanding Howard County holiday tradition, this 20-foot tall structure, which holds more than 685 potted poinsettia plants is sure to amaze. Located on the Lower Level near Lord & Taylor. For more information visit, www.themallincolumbia.com or call 410-730-3300

Santa's Coming to the Firehouse Museum, December 4, 2010; 12-5pm

Santa will be at the Firehouse Museum in historic Ellicott City to receive visitors of all ages. This is a great opportunity for the whole family to enjoy the charm of the historic village during hospitality weekend. Kids can chat with Santa and tell all the wishes. For more information visit, www.howardcountymd.gov/RAP or call 410-313-5131

Santastic at The Mall in Columbia

Visit the Mall in Columbia during the holidays for a visit with Santa unlike any other. Santa arrives each year in mid November and sets up shop in the Lord & Taylor Court. For hours and more information visit, www.themallincolumbia.com or call 410-730-3300

Savage Mill's Holiday Magic at the Mill, November 20 – December 24, 2010

Where the holiday fun, and shopping begins! Each weekend features live music and children's' activities. Over ten live musical performances, three puppet shows, plus extended shopping hours. For more information visit, www.savagemill.com or call 800-788-6455

Holiday Train Garden at the Fire Station

Ellicott City Fire Company #2 (4150 Montgomery Road, Ellicott City, MD 21043) hosts an annual Train Garden. Each year, families flock to see this adorned, 24 x 10 foot display with eight trains and tons of detail. Opens the first weekend in December; hours on Saturday and Sunday and Wednesday through Friday. For more information, call 410-313-2036

Holiday Open House at the Howard County Living Farm Heritage Museum

Take a drive through beautiful western Howard County and stop in to an old-fashioned Holiday Open House. Activities include a train garden, antique displays, live music, refreshments and rides (weather permitting). Usually happens the first two weekends in December from Noon to 4pm. For more information visit, www.farmheritage.org or call 410-489-2345

Springtime

Annual National Arbor Day Lanterns of Hope Procession

On Friday April 29, 2011 at 7:30pm to dark a community will come together to celebrate spring and honor the beauty of Howard County's blossoming cherry trees. Hand-made luminaries will create a sparkling display of light and hope in Historic Ellicott City, Maryland. For more information, www.blossomsofhope.com

Antique Car, Truck & Cycle Show Flea Market

This event is hosted by the Chesapeake Region Antique Automobile Club of America; parking and admission are free. It takes place annually each March, indoors and outdoors, rain or shine, at the Howard County Fairgrounds in West Friendship. For additional information, visit www.howardcountyfair.org

Blossoms Annual Display of Pink

Catch a spectacular display of pink each spring during the last two weeks of April, when over 1500 Kwanzan cherry trees blossom through out Howard County. Take a camera and picnic basket and visit any of eighteen different groves located at county libraries, local parks and historic attractions. Enjoy the trees while driving too, over 300 Blossoms of Hope Trees are planted along State and County roadways. For more information visit, www.blossomsofhope.com

Brighton Dam Azalea Garden

While technically not in Howard County, Montgomery County's Brighton Dam Azalea Garden is just a few hundred yards across the Patuxent River. The garden is easily accessed from the Triadelphia Reservoir west of Clarksville and greets visitors each spring with 22,000 blooms. For more information, call 301-774-9124 or visit, www.wssc.dst.md.us

Chamber Music Series - Columbia Orchestra

This is a free, Chamber Music concert series. Each performance takes place in the beautiful setting of Christ Episcopal Church. Concert Two: Saturday, April 2, 2011 - 7:30 p.m; Concert Three: Saturday, May 21, 2011 - 7:30 p.m. For more information call 410-465-8777 or visit, www.columbiaorchestra.org

Cherrybration Celebration in Historic Ellicott City

Historic Ellicott City, Maryland goes Pink on Saturday, April 29, 2011 in commemoration of over 1,500 beautiful pink Kwanzan cherry trees blossoming across Howard County. Festivities include the Pink Panes window décor contest, Shop Pink, Run Pink – the second annual Hills of Milltown 5K Challenge and many more family friendly activities. Proceeds support the programs at Claudia Mayer Cancer Resource Center. For more information visit, www.blossomsofhope.com

Columbia Bike About

This annual event features a new route of about 15 miles every year. Each new route is designed to acquaint cyclists with Columbia's historical, artistic and environmental places of interest and the connectivity of the extensive path system. BikeAbout typically happens the first weekend in May. For additional information, e-mail the Columbia Archives at columbia.archives@columbiaassociation.com

Daffodil Days at Whipps Cemetery Gardens

Whipps Cemetery Gardens, located off the southeast corner of Frederick Road and St. Johns Lane in Ellicott City, is open year round. Daffodil Days is an annual event held in either late March or early April. See blooming daffodils throughout the gardens while enjoying talks on the history and horticulture of the area. For more information, call 410-465-6721

Friends of the Patapsco Valley Heritage Greenway Project Clean Stream

Get involved and help clean up local streams. Friends of the Patapsco Valley Heritage Greenway (FPVHG) have taken the lead in coordinating, planning and conducting simultaneous cleanups within the Patapsco watershed in cooperation with Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay. Clean-ups usually take place on the first Saturday in April at various locations throughout Howard County. For additional information visit, www.patapscoheritagegreenway.org or call 410-480-0824

Maryland Sheep & Wool Festival

This unique festival has been held at the Howard County Fairgrounds on the first full weekend in May for more than 35 years. It is the largest festival in Howard County. Activities include weaving, shearing and sheepdog demonstrations, delicious lamb dishes and a large array of wool crafts. For additional information visit, www.sheepandwool.org or call 410-531-3647

Sharp's at Waterford Farm

Located in beautiful western Howard County. This family owned and operated 530 acre working farm offers fun, educational activities to children and adults. The spring and summer seasons highlight greenhouses and fields of all varieties of herbs, vegetables, and garden flowers. Also, be sure to check out the Country Store, it's overflowing with home-grown home and eatable goods. For hours or more information visit, <http://www.sharpfarm.com> or call 410- 489-2572

Summertime

Columbia Association's Columbia Archives Lakefront Walking Tours

All you need is your feet and the Columbia Association's Lakefront Walking Tour brochure to discover fascinating facts and folklore about the public art, architecture and design of Columbia's core. Also see connections between Jim Rouse, the goals he set for Columbia and the public art that expresses that vision. Pick up or have a copy sent to you by emailing Columbia.Archives@ColumbiaAssociation.com or calling 410 715 3103

Columbia Festival of the Arts

This signature event has taken place on Columbia's Lakefront for more than 20 years. Columbia Festival of the Arts presents a host of top-flight artists and performers for two weeks every June. While many of the events require tickets, the opening LakeFest weekend is a free event featuring popular live bands, artists and vendors, a sidewalk chalk drawing contest, and the ever-popular cardboard Boat Float. For more information visit, www.columbiafestival.org or call 410-715-3044

Courtyard Concert Series

Columbia Village Centers offer more than just shopping. Catch great outdoor concerts and various other acts of entertainment at the Dorsey's Search, Hickory Ridge, River Hill, Harper's Choice, Kings Contrivance and Wilde Lake village centers. Days and hours vary; events occur mid-June through mid-August. For a complete schedule or additional information visit, www.columbiavillagecenters.com or call 443-367-5123

Ellicott City Restoration Foundation Photo Contest Exhibit

Get an artist's perspective of Historical Ellicott City at Ellicott City Restoration Foundation's annual Photo Contest Exhibit and Reception. All photos are taken within the Ellicott City Historic District and remain on exhibit for two months. The reception takes place annually on the first Friday in June at the Howard County Historical Society in Ellicott City. There is no entry fee and cash prizes are awarded. For more information call, 410-247-9252

Lakefront Lunchtime Concerts at Lake Kittamaqundi

Get out of the office and lunch on the banks of beautiful Lake Kittamaqundi at Columbia Town Center while enjoying live music, free cold beverages, give-aways and more. Concerts occur weekly on Wednesdays, May through July. For an entertainment schedule or more information visit, www.ColumbiaAssociation.org or call 410-730-1801

Lakefront Summer Festival

The festival provides outdoor entertainment every night of the week, mid-June through mid-August. Bring a blanket or a lawn chair and enjoy live performances and movies on the lawn at the Columbia Town Center Lakefront. For a complete schedule or additional information, visit www.lakefrontfestival.com or call 410-715-3161

Movie Nights at the Wine Bin, Saturday nights in Spring, Summer and Fall

Bring your chairs and a picnic...it's Movie Time! Enjoy your favorite classics outdoors in Historic Ellicott City. Popcorn and candy sold to benefit local charities. Other activities include, wine tastings and shopping. For dates and more information visit, www.winebinec.com or call 410- 465-7802

Paint It: Ellicott City, A Juried Plein Air Paint-out

Artists are invited annually each summer to an organized "paint out" in Historic Ellicott City over two days. Festivities include street walking to see the artists at work, a welcome reception and gallery reception at the Howard County Arts Council. Receptions and sightseeing are free; however, fees apply to register as an artist. For more information visit, www.hocoarts.org or call 410-313-2787

Pick Your Own at Larriland Farm

Situated in beautiful western Howard County, this family-favorite offers acres of pick-your-own produce and flowers. Other attractions include hay rides, animals, seasonal fruits & vegetables, flowers and herbs and a country store! Admission is free; however, small fees may apply to activities. For more information visit, www.pickyourown.com or call 410-442-2605

Sunset Serenades at Centennial Park

Bring a blanket and picnic dinner and enjoy an evening performance in scenic Centennial Park in Ellicott City. Modestly priced concession menu items are available. Concerts occur weekly over the summer months. Parking donations are appreciated but not required. For a schedule of events or more information visit, www.howardcountymd.gov/rap/ or call 410-313-4700

Travelin' Bands Summer Time Concert Series

Grab a blanket, bring the family and enjoy the sounds of summer and free ice cream. Events are presented by the Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks and sponsored by Edy's Grand Ice Cream. Parking donations are appreciated; locations and dates vary. For a schedule of events or additional information visit, www.howardcountymd.gov/rap/ or call 410-313-4700

Autumn

Choose Civility Symposium

Inspired by the book *Choosing Civility: The 25 Rules of Considerate Conduct*, by Johns Hopkins University Professor Dr. P.M. Forni, Choose Civility is an ongoing community-wide initiative, led by Howard County Library. The Symposium is a free annual event, usually in October, that explores the role of civility with notable key note speakers. For more information visit, www.chooscecivility.org

Farm City-Celebration

Don't miss this county wide celebration that highlights Howard County's farm/city interdependence. A two-week itinerary of activities takes place all over the county at farms, museums, heritage, sites, community centers and libraries. Happens annually near the end of September through the beginning of October. Some fees and admissions may apply. For a listing of events or more information visit, www.farmheritage.org

Ellicott City Fall Festival

Enjoy a day in 236-year-old downtown Ellicott City. This family friendly event happens annually the last Saturday in September and features entertainment, kids' activities, side-walk sales and community displays. For more information visit, <http://ellicottcitymainstreet.com> or call 410-313-1900

Larriland Farm

Situated in beautiful western Howard County, this family favorite offers Acres of Pumpkins, pick-your-own produce, the Boo Barn, famous apple fritters and delicious treats, corn mazes, farm animals, hay rides and a country store overflowing with the season's bounty. Admission is free; however, small fees may apply to activities. For more information visit, www.pickyourown.com or call 410-442-2605

Sharp's at Waterford Farm

Located in beautiful western Howard County. This 530 acre working farm offers fun, educational activities to children and adults. Autumn highlights include traditional favorites plus a 10+ acre corn maze & mini maze. While there is no admission, some charges for activities may apply. Also, be sure to check out the Country Store that is overflowing with seasonal home-grown home and eatable goods. For hours or additional information visit, www.sharpfarm.com or call 410-489-2572

Rail-Trail's Fall Foliage Romantic Hike or Bike

Lovely fall foliage awaits along a 20-mile rail-trail that follows a former Baltimore & Ohio Railroad line under a canopy of red maple leaves along the Patuxent River. Beginning at Savage Park, the rail-trail crosses ten bridges, including, the 1902 Guilford Pratt Truss Bridge then through the grounds of a quarry that operated until 1928. The rail-trail ends at Lake Elkhorn in Columbia, great for picnicking. *Savage Park directions: 8400 Fair Street, Savage, MD, From Rt 32, exit onto Route 1 southbound. Immediately turn right onto Howard St., Howard Street becomes Baltimore St., Proceed 0.8 miles to park on right.*

50+EXPO

This not-to-be-missed annual event takes place in the middle of each October at Wild Lake High School in Columbia. Highlights include fun activities and more than 140 exhibitors. Free parking is located at The Mall in Columbia with shuttle service to and from the main entrance of the event. For a listing programs and exhibitors or for more information visit, www.co.ho.md.us/OA/CS_OfficeAging.htm or call 410-313-6410

With so much to do without spending a lot, it's easy to enjoy Howard County's diverse offerings. So come out for the day or an overnight stay at one of many cozy bed-and-breakfasts, posh hotels or anything in-between. Make a meal part of the experience at one of Howard County's many delightful dining choices from side-walk cafes and fast-food to white-linen dining. If that's not enough, throw in some shopping at one of Howard County's popular shopping destinations ranging from unique boutiques to popular chain stores. For more information visit, www.visithowardcounty.com

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